

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

USDEL FRANCE

CINCPAC

UNCLAS STATE 049401

E. O. 11652 N/ A

TAGS: PFOR, XC, US

SUBJECT: MARCH 16 INDOCHINA PRESS SUMMARY

1. ALL PAPERS FRONTPAGE PRESIDENT' S WARNING TO HANOI. SUN' S KEAT SAYS REFERENCE TO " MY ACTIONS OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS" APPEARS DESIGNED REMIND HANOI OF MINING AND CAMBODIA INCURSION. NYT' S APPLE SAYS WH STAFF AND DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY SAY PRESIDENT WAS SENDING " UNMISTAKABLE WARNING" TO HANOI THAT ITS ACTIONS RISK RESUMPTION OF US BOMBING. SOURCES SAY PRESIDENT EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO MAKE SUCH A MOVE WITH ONLY TWO MORE WEEKS BEFORE ALL POWS RETURNED. WH AIDE SAYS US NOT LOOKING FOR EXCUSE TO RESUME BOMBING AND WON' T DO SO UNLESS HANOI " BEHAVES LIKE A COMPLETE BANDIT." POST' S KILPATRICK OBSERVES THAT, WHILE PRESIDENT DECLINED SAY WHAT ACTIONS THE US MIGHT TAKE, MOST US AIR AND NAVAL FORCES THAT WERE IN SEA AT TIME OF C- F STILL THERE. UNCLASSIFIED

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THIS INCLUDES 1000 AIRCRAFT. KILPATRICK ADDS THAT PRESIDENT APPARENTLY " MISSPOKE" WHEN HE INDICATED

OBJECTION WAS NOT TO " REPLACEMENT PERSONNEL" BUT TO NVN RESUPPLY.

2. SUN' S ISAACS ACCOMPANIES POLISH ICCS TEAM TO VC-CONTROLLED BEN HET. VC CHIEF POLITELY REFUSES PERMISSION FOR EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS AND VISIT BECAUSE HIS HIGHER HEADQUARTERS HAD NOT AUTHORIZED. ISAACS TOLD VC THIS

PROBABLY BECAUSE SUN HASN' T BEEN ABLE GET IN TOUCH WITH PRG SAIGON DEL. VC SAID HE FAMILIAR WITH SUN' S REPORTING.

3. VC GEN. TRA TELLS NEWSMEN AT SHARP RECEPTION " AMERICANS GOOD SOLDIERS BUT FOUGHT WRONG WAR. THEY DID NOT HAVE IDEALS OUR SOLDIERS HAD." TRA SAYS GOAL OF 1972 SPRING OFFENSIVE WAS TO REACH POL SETTLEMENT AND FORCE US OUT OF VN. ASKED WHERE PRG CAPITAL LOCATED, TRA REPLIES " THERE ARE SOME THINGS I CANNOT TELL YOU" (NYT). TRA ASKS NEWSMAN IDENTITY OF TALL IMPECCABLY-DRESSED MAN ACROSS ROOM AND TOLD IT WAS BUNKER (WP).

4. US COMMAND SAIGON DECLINED COMMENT ON RADIO HANOI CHARGE OF C- F VIOLATION BY US FIGHTERS AND RECON PLANES NORTH OF DMZ, BUT US SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGES PLANES " GOT IN TOO CLOSE," AND IF ALLEGATIONS CONFIRMED, CORRECTIVE ACTION WILL BE TAKEN. RADIO ALSO CHARGED US CLANDESTINELY INTRODUCING WEAPONS INTO SVN FROM JAPAN. BRAY DENIES AND SAYS SHIPMENT DUE INTO DANANG UNDER PROVISIONS OF VN AGREEMENT PERMITTING PERIODIC REPLACEMENT OF MATERIEL ON PIECE- FOR- PIECE BASIS (WP, PHINQ).

5. SHARP TELLS NEWSMEN AT SAIGON CANADIANS NOT SATISFIED WITH WAY ICCS OPERATING. NYT' S BUTTERFIELD REPORTS GOC ICCS ROLE HOT POLITICAL ISSUE IN CANADA WITH MANY BELIEVING GOC MADE SERIOUS BLUNDER IN ACCEPTING ROLE. FONMIN LAM REPORTEDLY TELLS SHARP GVN READY DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE WORK OUT POL SETTLEMENT WITH COMMUNISTS AND AVOID FUTURE FIGHTING. SEVERAL SENIOR CANADIAN OFFICIALS INCREASINGLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT DIVISION IN ICCS AND PRG FAILURE PROVIDE UNCLASSIFIED

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PERSONNEL FOR JMC. ONE CANADIAN, HOWEVER, SAYS WORLD WOULDN' T UNDERSTAND CANADIAN PULLOUT AND IT WOULD HARM CANADA' S GOOD NAME (NYT).

6. 17 BUDDHISTS KILLED BY TERRORIST EXPLOSIVES IN DELTA PAGODA (SUN). AP REPORTS MY LAI NOW A QUIET NO- MAN' S TOWN STILL NOT SAFE AT NIGHT. VILLAGER ASKS REPORTER " WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? DON' T YOU KNOW AMERICANS KILLED MANY PEOPLE HERE?" (NYT, SUN).

7. CSM'S SOUTHERLAND REPORTS GVN PREVENTING MANY REFUGEES FROM RETURNING TO VILLAGES LOCATED IN VC- CONTROLLED AREAS. SOME SAY ARVN DELIBERATELY HARASSES THOSE WHO RETURN BY FIRING ARTILLERY INTO NEARBY AREAS AT NIGHT(CSM).

8. 1971 US MILITARY DOCTORS' EXAMINATION OF 116

CONSON PRISONERS WHO CLAIMED TO BE PARALYZED FROM MALNUTRITION AND MALTREATMENT CONCLUDED ALL WERE EITHER FAKING OR VICTIMS OF HYSTERIA. REPORT COMES TO LIGHT AGAINST BACKGROUND OF NEWSMEN'S INTERVIEWS WITH 13 PRISONERS WHO RECENTLY RELEASED AND CLAIM THEY CAN' T WALK BECAUSE THEY COULDN' T GET ENOUGH EXERCISE IN " TIGER CAGES" (WP).

9. NYT' S HERSH SAYS 8 OF ENLISTED MEN DUE BE RELEASED BY HANOI TODAY ARE BITTER CRITICS OF VN WAR " WHOSE REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN CAMP LIFE IN NORTH VIETNAM PROVOKED DEEP HOSTILITY AMONG THEIR FELLOW PRISONERS."

10. WILLIAMS AND CHAU BEGIN JEC PARIS DISCUSSIONS AND AGREE RESUME MONDAY (SUN).

11. FANK SAYS IT PUSHED COMMUNISTS BACK FIVE MILES IN HIGHWAY 2 FIGHTING WITH HELP OF BOMBING BY GOVERNMENT PLANES. CAMBODIAN AUTHORITIES ARREST 46 AND CONFISCATE 100 LBS OF FOOD IN PP MARKET IN MOVE TO STOP SELLING COMMODITIES ABOVE OFFICIAL PRICE INDEX (NYT, WP).

12. CSM (MARCH 15) SAYS SAIGON HAS WON FIRST POSTWAR UNCLASSIFIED

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ROUND - BIG. GVN RECAPTURED MOST AREAS COMMUNISTS GRABBED BEFORE C- F WENT INTO EFFECT. WHILE THIS REPRESENTS A MAJOR MILITARY SUCCESS FOR SAIGON AND THIEU, POLITICAL FACT IS THAT COMMUNISTS COULD PROBABLY HAVE HELD ON TO PLACES THEY GRABBED IF PEOPLE IN THEM HAD NOT REMAINED LOYAL TO SAIGON. WASHINGTON NOW WORRIED THAT FLOW OF MEN AND SUPPLIES CONTINUING DOWN PIPE- LINE MIGHT PRESAGE ANOTHER MAJOR MILITARY EFFORT AFTER 14 NVA DIVISIONS RECUPERATING FROM THEIR DEFEATS IN PRE- C- F HEAVY FIGHTING HAVE BEEN RESTED AND RESUPPLIED. WHAT CAN WASHINGTON DO ABOUT IT? FIRST THING IS TO START CLAIMING INFILTRATION IN VIOLATION OF AGREEMENT.

13. RAY CROMLEY (S- N, MAR. 15) SAYS THAT CAPTURED NVN DOCUMENTS POINT TO REVERSION TO MAO APPROACH THASVN - CONTROL COUNTRYSIDE, SURROUND CITIES. NOTES THAT OF

NVN TROOPS COMING DOWN HO TRAIL, THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT ONLY ONE REGIMENT (OR PORTIONS) MOVED INTO SVN IN RECENT WEEKS. QUESTION YET UNRESOLVED IS HOW SUCCESSFUL NVN WILL BE AT OPERATING THIS PROTRACTED WAR STRATEGY. INDICATIVE OF THEIR CONFIDENCE, SOUTH VIETNAMESE TELL OUR PEOPLE THAT OF 365 HAMLETS COMMUNIST CAPTURED AFTER C- F, SAIGON HAS RECAPTURED

ALL BUT SEVEN.

14. WSJ'S KEATLEY REVIEWS PRESIDENT'S MAR. 15 PRESS CONFERENCE, NOTING CONCERN WITH FLOW OF NEW OFFENSIVE WEAPONS AND IMPLIED THREAT OF REPRISAL. IN VIOLATING PEACE TERMS, HANOI MAY BE GAMBLING THAT NIXON DOESN'T DARE RENEW AIR RAIDS. ATTACKS WOULD AROUSE DEEP OPPOSITION AT HOME AND ABROAD. MORE IMPORTANTLY, RENEWED US ACTION WOULD VIOLATE VN ACCORDS, PERHAPS CAUSING THEM BE SCRAPPED BY NVN. NO SECRET THAT ADMINISTRATION WANTS TO BE RID OF WAR SO IT CAN TURN TO MORE VITAL FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS.

15. JOSEPH ALSOP (SUN AND WP) NOTES THAT OF NONMILITARY ERRORS MADE IN VN BY KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION, NIXON REGARDS DECISION TO IGNORE HANOI'S IMMEDIATE VIOLATION OF 1962 TREATY AS VERY WORST. THUS, ALSO SEES PRESIDENT DETERMINED TO MAKE PARIS PEACE TERMS STICK.
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16. LATIMES' FOISIE (MAR. 14) IN BANGKOK CITES RELIABLE SOURCES AS SAYING USAF IS KEEPING BOMBING CAPACITY IN THAILAND AT FULL STRENGTH. DURATION OF STAY DEPENDS ON HOW WELL C- F OBSERVED. SHIFT OF AMERICAN COMMAND HQS FROM SAIGON TO THAILAND IS RELATED TO MAINTENANCE OF ALL- OUT STRIKE CAPABILITY. STATE OF ALERT HAS REQUIRED US ARMED FORCES STRENGTH IN THAILAND TO REMAIN AT 45,000 - TWO- THIRDS AIRMEN.

17. CROSBY NOYES (S- N, MAR. 15) IN SAIGON COMMENTS THAT TWO THINGS SVN NEEDS NOW ARE PEACE AND MODEST FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO REPAIR WAR DAMAGE. BUT IRONICALLY, AS PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IMPROVE, AVAILABILITY OF US AID MORE PROBLEMATIC. CITES AID OFFICIAL AS SAYING THAT WHAT IS NEEDED IS PROGRAM OF ABOUT \$3 TO 33.5 BILLION SPREAD OVER FIVE- YEARS. WITH THAT KIND OF HELP ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR SVN COULD BE POSITIVELY DAZZLING. INCOMPREHENSIBLE THAT A NATION WHICH HAS SPENT CLOSE TO \$100 BILLION TO ACHIEVE PROSPECT OF PEACE SHOULD BALK AT SHELLING OUT \$3 BILLION OVER FIVE YEARS TO GET PAYOFF.

18. NYT NOTES THAT ARGUMENTS ON VN AID AREAS FRAGMENTED

AS COMPONENTS (I. E., NVN RECONSTRUCTION, ECONOMIC
AID TO WAR VICTIMS, SUPPORT FOR GVN, ETC.). ADVOCATES
CLOSEST SCRUTINY OF EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF AID TO BE
AUTHORIZED, AND HOW IT IS TO REACH END USE, NOTING
WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION IN DISPERSAL OF REFUGEE RELIEF
FUNDS IN SVN. ROGERS

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